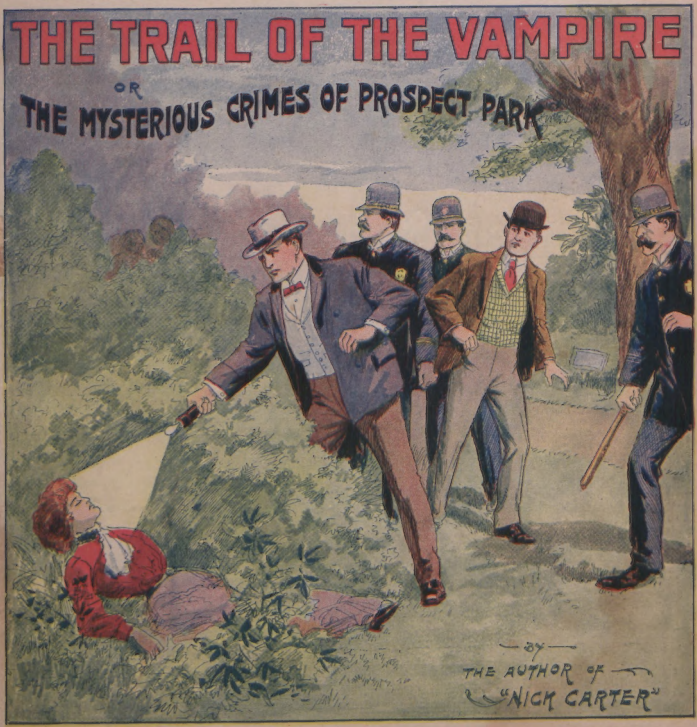
NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $3.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 404. Price, Five Cents.

THE TRAIL OF THE VAMPIRE

OR THE MYSTERIOUS CRIMES OF PROSPECT PARK



BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

"There has been murder here," said Nick Carter, as the flash of his electric lamp showed him that his search had been rewarded and revealed the body of Flora Mason.

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No. 404. NEW YORK, September 24, 1904. Price Five Cents.

THE TRAIL OF THE VAMPIRE;

OR,

The Mysterious Crimes of Prospect Park.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A MOST MYSTERIOUS ASSAULT.

Pleasure seekers in Prospect Park, in Brooklyn, were turning their footsteps homeward. The sun had gone down and the dusk of evening was gathering thickly under the spreading branches of the trees. The hottest day of any June which the oldest inhabitant of the city could remember, was drawing to a close.

For more than an hour past, groups of women and children, boys and girls, and youth of all sorts and conditions, had been thronging toward the gates on their way out of the park, just as they had thronged into it during the early part of the day.

And, as is always the case, there were loiterers.

Here and there a knot of youths and young women were still discussing the games of the day, and they stood about, twirling their tennis racquets, their golf clubs or their mallets in their hands as they talked.

One of these late groups was composed of four persons—one youth and three young women—approximately of the same age, seventeen or eighteen years old.

As they approached the gate by which they intended to leave the park, one of the girls, Flora Mason by name, paused suddenly and exclaimed to the others:

"Goodness! I left my tennis racquet back there on the grass where we were sitting after the game. Wait for me and I will get it."

Without pausing to listen to the offer of Morgan Bliss, their escort, to go after it for her, she darted away

and was out of sight in a moment, while the others dropped idly upon a bench beside the path to await her return.

They continued their bantering talk while they waited, and it was not until a quarter of an hour had passed that it occurred to one of them that their companion was gone a long time after the racquet.

"Isn't it time that Flora was back?" she asked, addressing nobody in particular, but the group collectively.

"She ought easily to go and return inside of ten minutes," replied the young man. "The way she gets over the ground almost annihilates time, you know."

"I'll go and meet her. It is getting dark under the trees," said Dora Delmar, rising; and she did as Flora Mason had done in the first place, that is she darted away before objection could be made, and disappeared among the shadows of the trees.

The two who were left behind, Agnes Glenn and Morgan Bliss, watched her retreating figure in silence; and, presently, when another ten minutes had elapsed, Agnes remarked, nervously:

"What do you suppose can be keeping them, Morgan?"

"Blessed if I know," was the reply. "Funny, isn't it?"

"Don't you think we had better go after them?" she asked again, presently.

"If you like," he assented. "They must be somewhere between here and the tennis court."

They left the bench and started back in the direction the others had taken, and after they had proceeded a considerable distance without seeing a sign of their friends, they called out, one after the other; and as they called the names of the two girls, they stopped and listened for a reply.

But it was only silence and the chirping of insects which came to them out of the shadows.

"Something has happened to them, Morgan," said Agnes, timidly.

"Nonsense," he replied. "What could happen to them here, in the park? They have met somebody and have stopped to talk it over. They have simply forgotten all about the fact that we are waiting for them."

Reassured by the confident tone he used, Agnes gained new heart.

"Let us go ahead, then, and find them," she said; and so they started on again.

The shadows were deepening with every moment, and already it was quite dark under the trees, so they hurried their footsteps until they were almost in a run, and after a few moments, arrived, panting and almost breathless, at the tennis court.

It was deserted.

There was not a sign of a human being anywhere about, and to their repeated calls of "Flora!" and "Dora!" they received no answer.

"They have played a joke on us and have gone around another way," said Morgan, somewhat roughly, for he did not relish that kind of a joke.

"No," remonstrated Agnes. "It is not at all like either one of them to do that, and you know it as well as I do, Morgan Bliss. Something has happened to them! Something dreadful! I feel it! I know it!"

"Bosh!" said Morgan.

"Something has happened to them," insisted Agnes. "Look! What is that?"

She pointed with her finger toward the opposite side of the court where a belated shred of daylight was reflected from a window or a spire in the neighborhood upon the level sod.

Then, as she pointed, she darted forward, and presently stooping, she grasped something which was lying on the ground. Then she turned and held it before her companion's eyes.

"It is Flora's racquet," he said, helplessly.

"Of course, it is," replied Agnes.

"Then she did not even come back here at all, for it," he continued, lamely.

"No; nor Dora, either."

"Where could they have gone?"

"It is plain that neither of them came here," said Flora, and she was turning away when Mason caught her arm and asked abruptly:

"Didn't Flora have a red rose in her hair?"

"Of course she did. She picked it up on the path and joked about it. Why?"

"I mean, didn't she find the rose after we left here—while we were on our way to the gate?"

"Certainly she did. She found it after we were almost halfway to the gate. Why?"

"Then she did come back here. See. Yonder is the rose she wore in her hair. I know it is the same rose by the fact that I saw her tie that knot in the stem of it."

He pointed now toward a spot on the grass not far from where Agnes had discovered the racquet, and then he hastened forward and secured it.

"Look!" he said. "It has been trodden on."

Agnes was now thoroughly frightened, and she stood wringing her hands together in an agony of apprehension.

"Let us run," she exclaimed. "I am afraid," but Morgan Bliss was made of stouter stuff, and he held his ground.

"Wait," he said. "Nothing will hurt us. The girls have been here and gone. Something has called them away before Flora had time to secure her racquet. Possibly there was somebody near her who frightened her, and in running away she met Dora."

"But whatever it was that frightened them, might frighten us also," pleaded Agnes.

"Nonsense! Whatever it is, it can't frighten me. I will call again, and then if they do not answer, we will return to the gate. We will doubtless find them there waiting for us."

Then together they called each name, one after the other, with all the strength of their lungs; but with all their calling, and, although they continued it for some time, they received no response.

"They have returned toward the gate. We must have missed them," said Morgan, presently, for in spite of his resolutions to the contrary, a sort of nervous dread was getting its hold upon him also. "It is much too dark now for us to see anything here, anyhow. Come. We will go to the gate."

He seized his companion reassuringly by her arm, and they started back together, making all the speed they could without running.

In this way they passed from the tennis courts into and upon the pathway; and then, as they had done before in order to make a short cut across a loop in the path, they turned across a thickly wooded slope.

The distance across this part of their journey was about the length of a city block, and they had accomplished about half the distance, when suddenly, as if from every side of them at once, a dozen dark forms leaped upon them.

Agnes screamed when she felt herself seized, and she was conscious only that she was lifted from her feet, and that she was being borne away through the trees, when she lost consciousness—that is, she fainted away.

But Morgan Bliss was not made of the stuff which faints away at the first sign of real danger, and as his assailants seized upon him, he struck out lustily with his fists while at the same time, with all the strength of his lungs, he called lustily for help.

The darkness there under the trees was dense, and it seemed to him as if he were surrounded by enemies. Through the gloom he could dimly discern that they

were no taller than himself, but they seemed lithe and active, and as agile as flies.

Through it all, their assailants were silent.

Not a sound save those made by the struggle itself, the scuffling of their feet upon the turf, Agnes' scream and his own lusty shouts—no other sounds than these broke the silence of the woods, except that once he heard, or fancied he heard, a sharp hiss like the warning of an angry serpent; and then there was a crash at the back of his head, as a heavy blow descended upon it.

When Morgan came to his senses a moment later, a park guard was standing over him, and he could see that two more were at the same instant lifting Agnes from the ground.

"Did they get away?" he gasped, as he attempted to rise.

"Did who get away? Did what get away?" demanded the guard. "You got scared at the dark, that is what was the matter with you. There wasn't a sign of anybody here, and you and the young lady are in the park after hours. It's an old trick, and a good one, to get out of the park without going to the station house, but it won't work but once for you. You'd better——"

"I tell you it was no trick," cried Mason, excitedly. "We lost our companions—two girls—Flora Mason and Dora Delmar, and while we were searching for them we were attacked by a pack of ruffians."

The three policemen laughed aloud in derision. Agnes was quietly weeping.

"There is the gate, yonder, young man," said one of the officers. "You had better get outside of it as soon as possible, unless you prefer to go to the station house."

CHAPTER II.

THE MURDER IN THE PARK.

It was about eight o'clock that night when Morgan Bliss and Agnes Glenn were thus summarily driven from the park by the guards who would not listen to their story, and they had no recourse but to obey, in the hope that their two friends, for whose safety they now feared the worst, were already at their respective homes.

"Don't say a word about what has happened until I find out if the girls are safe," said Morgan, as he parted from her.

"But suppose they are not at home, what will you do then?" asked Agnes.

"I know exactly what I'll do," replied Morgan. "I know Nick Carter. In fact, I am one of the few boys in town who do know him. I will get him and we will go after the girls. Don't say a word now until you hear from me."

With that they parted, and Morgan hurried directly to the home of Flora Mason where he rang the bell and asked for her with the air of one who confidently expected that she was at home; but the servant who replied to his summons informed him that she had not returned from the park and had doubtless gone home with one of her girl friends.

From there he hastened to the home of Dora Delmar, where he asked the same question and received approximately the same answer; and then——

He hurried to Nick Carter's house in Manhattan.

"Well, Morgan," said Nick Carter, greeting him cordially, "how are you? You look troubled. What has happened?"

"Flora Mason and Dora Delmar have disappeared," replied Morgan, shortly. "I thought perhaps you would help me to find them."

"Disappeared, eh?" and the detective smiled indulgently.

"Really, sir, I am not joking," persisted Morgan. "I am in deadly earnest, and I am very badly frightened. I haven't said a word to anybody yet, for I thought it best to come directly to you, but the truth is that the girls have disappeared very mysteriously, and also that

Agnes Glenn and I were assaulted in the park, soon after the others disappeared."

"Tell me all about it," ordered the detective; and then the young man recited, almost word for word, all that has already been told here.

The detective did not interrupt him once. He preferred always to get a story exactly as it happened to the person who related it; and when Morgan had finished his tale, he looked at his watch.

"This looks rather serious, Morgan," he said then. "I think we had better look into it at once, and the first thing to do is to inform the parents of the girls of the situation. You did wrong in not telling them at once."

"I thought it best to come to you first, sir," replied Morgan. "The truth is, I expect that I was more excited and alarmed than I realized. Do you think that they have been murdered?"

"I think that something has happened to them. Come. We will go to their parents."

At the homes of the two girls, nothing had been heard of them. No alarm had been felt concerning them, for the reason that each family supposed the missing girl to be at the house of the other one, for the two were chums and had long been in the habit of spending the evenings together in one house or the other, after a day in the park.

It was with difficulty that Nick persuaded the parents of the young women to let him undertake the search for them in his own way, but he finally convinced them that they could do nothing personally, while, on the other hand, he could easily set the entire police force in motion in their behalf.

"It is best for you to wait here until I make an investigation," he said. "I will call each of you up over the telephone within an hour and inform you of anything that has happened."

His first act on leaving the house was to go to the nearest police station, and from there to arrange for such assistance as he might need, from the different parts of the city; and one of the things which he directed done without delay, was to have every exit of the park under surveillance, and to permit no person, no matter who or what, to enter or leave it without permission.

The regular park policemen were also instructed, through their captain, to turn out their entire reserve and to place themselves under the immediate direction of the detective.

Thus, by the time that the detective, accompanied by Morgan Bliss, arrived at the entrance gate near which the four young people had paused when Flora remembered her lost racquet and started to return for it, there was not a police station throughout the city of Greater New York which had not received an account of the affair, together with a full description of the missing young ladies.

"Here is where we stopped when Flora said that she had forgotten her racquet," said Morgan, coming to a halt when they reached the spot.

"Well, what happened then?" asked Nick.

"Nothing, only that she started back at once. She does everything like a shot out of a gun, and before I had a chance to offer to return for her, she was a hundred feet up the path. I don't think she heard me at all."

"Did you call to her at all?"

"No; she asked us to wait, and we sat down on that bench and waited."

"How long did you wait?"

"I don't know exactly, of course. I should think it must have been fifteen or twenty minutes before we began to wonder why she did not return."

"And then?"

"Then Dora Delmar started after her."

"How long did you wait after that?"

"Probably ten or fifteen minutes."

"And then?"

"We called and they did not reply. Then we started after them. I have already told you what happened after that."

"Yes. Is this the piece of woods where you were attacked?"

"Yes, sir. It was right here; but it was when we were returning."

"I understand. We will go around this place if you please, Morgan."

Four of the park guards had accompanied the detective and Morgan from the entrance, and Nick now turned to them.

"One of you will remain here on guard until I return," he said. "You will have nothing to do save to see to it that no person whatever steps a foot on the space between these two pathways until I have a chance to study it by daylight; and see that you keep off of it yourself. The ground is rather soft here, and it should have a story to tell, if there is a story here."

They skirted the place where the struggle had taken place and presently came again into the path; and after passing along this for a short distance they came out upon the tennis courts.

"Now, Morgan," said Nick, "take the lead and show me the spot where you discovered the tennis racquet and the rose. By the way, what did you do with them?"

"We left them where we found them, sir?"

"You dropped them again, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I don't know why. I took the racquet from Agnes and was holding it in my hand when I discovered the rose. I remember that I dropped it when I found the rose, and that I threw the rose away afterward."

"Then take me to the spot where you left them."

It was only a short distance across the courts to the desired point, and they soon reached it.

"Now," said Nick Carter, "stand back while I go forward. I will have to use my light in order to discover anything. Point, as nearly as you can, to the spot where you left the racquet and the rose."

"Right over there," said Morgan, pointing with his finger; and the detective stepped swiftly forward, pressing the button of his pocket searchlight as he did so.

The racquet and the rose were lying side by side upon the grass, where Morgan had dropped them, and without touching either of them, the detective searched with the point of his light every thong of the tightly laced racquet, and every petal and leaf of the rose.

Presently he turned the racquet over on the grass and searched the opposite side of it, and then he raised it in his hand and deposited it under his coat.

"Morgan," he asked, "had you, or, in fact, any of your party, cut a finger or a hand so that it bled, during the afternoon?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"I am positive that I did not; and I am sure that if one of the girls had done so, I would have known about it."

"And you did not hear of anything of the kind?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. Take this racquet and keep it under your coat. Don't handle it with your hands more than you can help. Now stand where you are, all of you, while I do a little looking around. It is too bad that this is a grass court. If it were only bare ground I might hope to ascertain definitely who has been here."

He had turned away by this time and was now searching the ground in a systematic manner, for the light which his electric apparatus afforded was especially adapted for that purpose.

He first took a course north and south, passing in

parallel lines up and down the court, until he had in this way covered the entire width of it; then he changed about and searched it east and west after the same fashion, until he had covered the entire length of the space, so that there was not a square inch of the surface of that court which he did not cover with his light and search with his eyes.

Sometimes he stooped over and seemed to caress the short blades of grass with his fingers, and once he studied for a long time a tuft of grass which had grown more luxuriantly than those around it, or which had been for some reason neglected by the mower.

Then, when he had completed that network search of the length and width of the tennis court, he commenced a second inspection around the edges of it, traveling this time in a circle, which became larger and larger as he proceeded, until his companions could see only the flashing of his light in the distance.

Then, quite suddenly, he returned to them.

"Morgan," he said, quietly, "there has been murder here. The body of Flora Mason lies yonder. She is quite dead."

CHAPTER III.

THE LITTLE MEN OF THE NIGHT.

Morgan Bliss staggered back from the detective with a cry of terror.

"No! no! no!" he cried. "My God, is it possible? Did you find her body? Is it there?"

"Hush, lad! Keep your nerve. Yes; her body is there: I found it."

"Are you sure that she is dead? May you not be mistaken?"

"No: there is no mistake. She has been dead several hours. No doubt she was lying there, dead, when you and Agnes stood here calling to her."

"It is horrible!" sobbed the young man.

"Yes," replied the detective, "it is awful."

Suddenly Morgan raised his face from his hands where he had hidden it.

"And Dora Delmar! Where is she? Is she there, also? Has she also been murdered? Did you find her body, also?"

"No, Morgan. It is not so bad as that, I hope. There have been several persons here—half a dozen or more, I should say—but who and what they were or are I cannot tell you, only that they were barefooted."

"Barefooted! Is that why they made no noise when they rushed upon Agnes and me, back there in the woods?"

"Probably."

"But where is Dora?"

"I think they have carried her away."

"But if they killed Flora, would they not kill Dora, also?"

"Who can say, Morgan?" replied Nick.

He turned to the remaining officers then, and said:

"I wish that one of you would return to the station as soon as you can and inform your captain of what we have discovered. You will have to telephone for the coroner at once. The others may remain here. Morgan, if you wish to see the body of your friend, come with me."

He led the way across the tennis court and thence over a bank into a little glade where the trees grew thickly together, and then, directing the rays of his light among the hanging foliage, he said:

"Look, Morgan, but do not go forward or attempt to touch her until I have given you permission."

Flora Mason was lying on her back under the spreading leaves of a small lilac bush. One arm—her right one—was stretched along her side, and rested, palm downward, upon the ground. The other—the left—was bent so that the palm of the hand was under her

head. Her feet were crossed so that the toes came together, and her clothing was in perfect order.

She appeared, indeed, save for the awful pallor which the light revealed, to have fallen asleep there, for her features were composed, and the eyes were closed, as if some person had pressed down the lids after the breath had fled from her body. A chain of imitation pearls, which she had worn about her neck, still glistened against her bosom, and a jeweled chatelaine watch, of which she had been very proud, indeed, was still ticking merrily against her bodice. Her hair, which glowed like copper in the gleam of the detective's electric light, was not disordered in any way, and her lips were parted as if she were smiling when death overtook her.

Save for one telltale stain, there was no mark of violence upon her, so far as present investigation had divulged; but there, in her throat under the jaw—almost under the ear—there was a stain of blood where it had oozed from a tiny round hole and trickled in a yet tinier stream, down her neck until it had discolored the band she wore around her neck.

"Stay where you are, Morgan," ordered Nick again; and then he crept cautiously forward until he was close beside the murdered girl.

Morgan Bliss, watching him, saw that he was studying the ground around where she was lying, rather than the body itself, and he wondered; but as he watched, he saw the detective's light move from point to point, here and there, now pausing, now going ahead, now drifting back again and then proceeding as before, until he became fascinated with the sight and wondered what the man could be discovering that proved so interesting that he seemed utterly oblivious of his surroundings.

Presently Nick rejoined Morgan.

"It is a sad case, my lad, and one which will stir the people of this city as they have never been stirred before, when once the truth is known. Come, now. I will leave the officers in charge, and we will return to the city. It is our sad duty now to prepare the parents of this poor girl for the shock of our discovery."

"Was she murdered?" asked Morgan.

"Yes; she was murdered."

"How; and by whom?"

"How? That is a difficult question to answer, Morgan, unless one chooses to go by mere appearances alone, in which case one would say that she was killed by a sharp instrument which pierced her throat, and—but that is enough for the present. But by whom? That is another question entirely. In broad language I should answer, by a band of fiends."

"The same who attacked me?"

"Yes; the same who attacked you and Agnes Glenn. Doubtless, my boy, both you and Agnes would have met the fate which came to this poor girl, had not your cries attracted the attention of the guard, and had not your assailants heard them approaching."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Morgan.

"Ah, Heaven forbid, indeed! It would seem as if Heaven should forbid the enactment of such a deed as that; but it has happened."

"And Dora? Do you think that she has met with the same fate?"

"I greatly fear, Morgan, that she has."

"Oh, God!"

"I fear that when the park is searched, her body will be found in much the same condition this one is in. I think that her wound will be the same. I have tried to study myself out of that belief, but I cannot overcome it."

"But what manner of man could perform such fiendish acts, Mr. Carter?"

"Do not ask me. I do not know. I only surmise. Come; we will go back now. Do not ask me any more questions, for there is little more that I am prepared to tell you at present. It is better now that I should question you; but wait until I have given these officers

their directions; then I will talk to you as we return to the city."

Later, when he had told the officers what he wished done, and had given directions for the search for the body of Dora Delmar, which he believed would be discovered somewhere inside the park, and after they had passed into the lighted streets of the city, he said:

"Now, Morgan, I wish to ask you something about that attack upon you and Agnes. What was the first warning that you received of it?"

"I received no warning at all. We had no idea that we were in any danger until the creatures leaped out upon us."

"Why do you use the word creatures?"

"Because no other word seems to apply."

"Why not?"

"They came upon us so silently."

"Did they make no noise?"

"Not a sound, unless there was a slight pattering, such as a lot of barefooted boys might make on the soft earth."

"These creatures, as you call them, were barefooted, Morgan. Now, tell me, was it so dark that you could not see them?"

"I could see nothing save a horde of dark forms clustering about me."

"Could you determine their size at all?"

"They were not bigger than I am: not as big, I should say. I know that by the way they fell about me when I hit them."

"Ah! You struck several of them, did you?"

"Yes; several; I do not know how many."

"Did they fall when you struck them?"

"Yes, indeed."

"They did not impress you as being strong men, then?"

"Not at all. Rather as boys. In fact, I remember that it flashed through my mind that we were attacked by a band of boy robbers, younger than myself."

"When you struck them—when your hands touched them, what sort of clothing did you feel with that sense of touch? Do you remember?"

"I am afraid that I do not."

"They did wear some kind of clothing, did they not? You would remember if your hand had come in contact with naked skin, would you not?"

"Sure I would."

"Or if your hands had touched hair, you would recall the fact?"

"Oh, yes; I am sure I would."

"And you are positive that you did not touch either naked skin, or hair?"

"Yes; I think I am."

"Did they utter no exclamations? No words?"

"Not an exclamation. Not a word did I hear."

"Nothing at all but a sound like the pattering of feet?"

"Once, just before I was knocked senseless, the air around me seemed to be filled with a hissing sound, as if a den of serpents had broken loose there."

"You did not tell me that before."

"Because I was not sure of it. The sound of the hissing seems more like a dream; the blow came so quickly after it."

"And you have no idea how many there were?"

"No; save that I thought there were a lot of them."

"And is that all you know about it, Morgan?"

"Yes; everything."

"Now, tell me, have you ever heard of any other person meeting with an adventure at all like yours, in this park?"

"Only once, and that was last week. One of my friends was in the park with a young lady. It was not so late as this was, but it was getting dark and they were cutting across a lot of woods the same as

we were when they were attacked in the same manner. At least, that was the story he told to us, but nobody believed him, and we made such fun of him that he won't speak of the subject at all, now. His name is Edward Moran, and we will pass his house in a moment. Would you like to stop there."

"Yes. It is rather late, but I think we will stop," replied the detective.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOLLOW NEEDLE AND THE WOUND.

Edward Moran had retired, but upon being told that the great Nick Carter wished to see him, he lost no time in presenting himself in the parlor, where his father was in the meantime endeavoring to entertain the detective while he wondered what reason the officer could have for calling upon his son at that hour of the night.

"You may remain, Mr. Moran, while I question your son, if you will," said the detective. "I wish you to hear all that is said. Now, Edward, Morgan Bliss has told me a strange story about an attack that was made upon you in the park not long ago. I wish you to tell me about it."

"Why should I talk about it? Not one of the boys would believe a word of it."

"I believe it; and so does Morgan believe it—now," replied Nick. "When did it happen?"

"Last week. A week ago to-night, in fact."

"Where, in the park, were you when it happened?"

"In the little woods you cross from one path to another in coming from the tennis court to the gate where I came out."

"It was the same place, Mr. Carter," volunteered Morgan.

"And you were not alone, Edward?"

"No."

"Who was with you?"

"A young lady. I would rather not tell her name, unless it is absolutely necessary."

"Very well. You need not tell it for the present. Was it dark when you were attacked?"

"It was dark in there; yes, sir."

"Did you see who it was who attacked you?"

"No, sir. The first that I knew about it we were both grabbed from behind. It seemed to me as if there were a dozen on me all at once."

"Were they men or boys?"

"I don't know, sir. They might have been either—or neither."

"But they must have been one or the other, don't you think so?"

"I don't know, sir. They did not seem to me to be exactly like human beings."

"Why not?"

"They were so still and so silent."

"Didn't they say anything?"

"Not a word or a sound of any kind except that I heard a hissing, like a lot of snakes."

"When did you hear that?"

"When I yelled for help and we heard the guard rushing toward us."

"Didn't you get even a glimpse of the persons who attacked you?"

"Not one."

"Why? Was it too dark in there to see anything?"

"Not exactly that, sir, although that was one reason."

"What were other reasons?"

"Well, for one thing, they came upon us from behind. The first I knew there seemed to be two or three of them hanging around my neck. For another thing, they covered up my eyes so that I could not see."

"What did they cover your eyes with? Their hands?"

"No; some kind of a coarse cloth, like burlap, I think."

"What happened then?"

"Nothing happened then, except that I fought and struggled with all my might. The young lady who was with me screamed, and I yelled for help. Then, while we were still struggling, we heard the guard coming, and then I got a wallop on the head which sort of laid me out, although it didn't hurt much, and I was getting on my feet again when the guard arrived."

"And by that time the men who had attacked you were gone, I suppose?"

"There wasn't a sign of them anywhere. They went as they came, without a sound."

"Have you any idea where they came from?"

"Not unless they dropped from the trees."

"Humph!" said the detective. "It is quite within the range of possibility that they did that very thing."

"Yes, sir. I think so."

"Did you tell the guard about them?"

"Yes; but they only laughed at me."

"They would not believe what you said, eh?"

"No; they seemed to think it was a put-up job."

"Did the young lady see any more than you did?"

"Not as much, according to her say. I don't think she saw anything at all."

"When you were fighting them off, did you hit any of them with your hands?"

"I think so. I hope so. I certainly tried to do so."

"Do you remember any impression you received from the sense of touch when your hands came in contact with them?"

"No, sir. I don't think I received any impression of that kind at all."

"But you do think, do you not, that if there had been anything unusual about them—as, for example, if they had been naked, or if their bodies had been covered with hair—you would have remembered it?"

"Sure thing."

"And now have you told me everything you know about the circumstance?"

"Yes, sir; everything."

"Have you been inside the park after nightfall since that time?"

"No, sir. There is plenty of room outside for me, after dark."

"Now, what is your impression of the matter? Do you think you were attacked by boys?"

"Yes, sir, that is what I really think. They weren't big enough and strong enough for men, and there must have been half a dozen of them, at least."

"I see."

"Half a dozen men could have handled me without all that fuss, and, another thing, if a man had hit me that whack on the head which laid me out, it would have done the work for fair. I don't think I would have been coming to when the coppers arrived if that had been the case."

"Well reasoned. Now will you answer a question or two about the young lady?"

"If I can, sir."

"Was she attacked in the same manner that you were?"

"Almost."

"How was it different in her case?"

"Well, they did not hit her on the head for one thing, although they did seize her from behind the same as they did me."

"What else?"

"She was so frightened that she supposed she had fainted, until afterward she remembered that the cloth they pressed over her face had a strange odor which half strangled her. She thought afterward that it might have been that which produced insensibility."

"She did become insensible, then?"

"Yes; but she recovered almost as soon as I did."

"Now, what else? For I see by your manner that there is something else."

"Yes, sir, there is. She asked me to say nothing about it, but I do not see that it can do any harm to tell you."

"On the contrary, it may do a great deal of good. What is it?"

"She was wounded."

"Wounded?"

"Yes; whether they intended to hurt her-or it was only an accident, I cannot say, but it is a fact that she was wounded so that she bled quite freely for some time after it."

"How was she wounded, and where?"

Edward Morgan thrust his fingers in his vest pocket and drew forth a strange-looking implement which he put into the outstretched hand of the detective.

"That is what wounded her," he said. "It was sticking in the right side of her neck, under her ear; about two and a half or three inches down from the ear, I should say. You will notice that there is a little bulb on the pointed end of it, just behind the sharp point. It was apparently hanging by that. There was quite a resistance when I pulled it out."

Nick took the instrument in his hand and examined it closely.

It was about three and a half inches in length, and for half that distance was about the circumference of an ordinary lead pencil; from there, however, it tapered toward a point, until finally, at the extremity, it was as sharp as a needle—and it was, in fact, as Nick presently discovered—a hollow needle.

Before it reached the point, however, there was an acorn-shaped bulb, about a quarter of an inch in length, and large enough so that if the instrument were inserted in the flesh of a person, the bulb would retain it there, as Edward Moran had described the case of the young woman who had been with him in the park.

"I would like to keep this for the present, Edward," he said. "You have no objections, I suppose?"

"Certainly not, if it will be of any service to you."

"Thank you. Now, have you ever heard of any other person being attacked in this manner?"

"No, sir."

"Nor any rumors of the kind?"

"No, sir; not exactly."

"What do you mean by not exactly?"

"Well, sir, out at the other end of the park there have been two or three deaths among the children of the poor people, that I have heard about. They have all been reported as accidents, and until this occurred to me I have not thought about them."

"Why should you think about them now?"

"Because in each of those cases the children were supposed to have fallen and hurt themselves so that they bled to death, and I believe an explanation of each accident was discovered ready at hand in each case; but the fact that they were all wounded in the neck, and in about the same spot on the neck where this young lady friend of mine was hurt, has made me wonder if those little men of the night might not have had something to do with it."

"Humph!" said the detective. And then he added:

"That will do for the present, Edward, but I wish you to keep entirely silent about this interview until you hear from me again."

"Yes, sir. I will do that."

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY OF THE CRIME.

Nick Carter and his chief assistant, Chick, were seated together in the "Den" in Nick Carter's house.

It was the morning of the third day after the discovery of the murder of Flora Moore and [illegible] mar, for, as Nick had predicted, the body of the latter

had been found not a quarter of a mile away from the remains of the first victim of the tragedy.

It had been discovered about midday of the day following the double crime, and was, to all intents and purposes, in precisely the same condition, as well as position.

There was the same peaceful smile on the lips, the eyelids had been closed together with the same evident care, one arm was stretched along the side of the body while the other arm was bent and with the palm of the hand under the head.

As in the case of Flora, the body appeared to be sleeping rather than dead, there was the same marble pallor, and the same strange wound in the side of the throat under the ear, from which only a very little blood had flowed.

In each case, however, the autopsy had shown that plainly a very little blood was left in the body, and the mystery of its disappearance was the most puzzling feature of the crimes.

But that was not all.

Nick had investigated the strange deaths of the three children of South Brooklyn, who had been supposed by their parents and friends to have died from the result of accidents, and he had found that their deaths were without doubt due to the same cause or causes as those of the two young women of the tennis court.

Nor was that all, either.

While Chick sat facing his chief in the private sanctum of the latter, Nick Carter held the morning paper found in hand. He had just dropped it upon his knee after reading aloud an article which appeared there: and that article was headed: "Another Prospect Park Tragedy."

In this article were given the details of the finding of still another body which had evidently lost life in the same manner and after the same method.

And this time, as in the other cases, the victim was a young girl.

The horror of it all had convulsed the neighborhood of the park. People dreaded to permit their children to play there any more, and the entire neighborhood was horrified by the terror of the inexplicable mystery.

Nick Carter had not been idle during this time. He had worked steadily and tirelessly on the case, but as yet with little result which would have appealed to the ordinary understanding.

Just what he had accomplished nobody, save himself, and his assistant, knew; and much of this he had not yet told to Chick.

Now, however, he had reached the point where he wished to discuss it with his favorite, and the report in the paper, which he had just read aloud, had accelerated that desire.

"Now, Chick," he said, "let us go over the ground carefully. Something has got to be done, and that at once. I haven't the least idea that this case has any connection whatever with the old case of Dazaar, but yet I find a suggestion leading to the solution of this one, in that case. Do you remember when you were captured and taken to the house in the Adirondacks, and what happened to you there?"

"Well, rather."

"Do you remember that we decided at the time that Dazaar herself was a sort of human vampire, and that you were spared only because she had grown to—shall I say it?"

"Yes; say it, if it will help to end this horror."

"That she spared you only because she had learned to love you?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe that there are such things as human vampires in the world, Chick?"

"No; and yet, I might have been forced to a belief in the theory, for all that."

"You mean, then, that you will admit that there are things in the world which you do not believe simply for the reason that you have not personally known about them, but that, nevertheless, there is a possibility of their being true?"

"Yes; that is the idea."

"Very well. With that start, I will proceed. When I went to the park the other night with young Morgan Bliss, I did not examine the ground in the wood where he had been attacked, preferring to leave that until daylight. I did, however, return there as soon as it was day, and I made a thorough examination."

"I supposed, of course, that you had done so."

"To the naked eye there was not a trace on the ground to be discovered, save here and there a slight impression of a heavy substance. But the ground is too generally trodden upon, and is much too hard to give much impression of anything."

"But you used your glass, did you not."

"Yes; it did not tell me much more than I had discovered during the night on the tennis courts, but it did corroborate everything I found there. I found, for example, that barefooted persons had been there, and with the aid of the glass I managed to trace out a pretty clear idea of the full impression of one foot."

"That is something, at least."

"Is it? Well, it isn't much, for that foot was so small that it would disgrace a child of ten."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Possibly it was not an average foot. It might really have been made by a child, and have been there through a mere coincidence."

"I have thought of that, but I do not accept the idea as good; no: I believe it was made by one of the actors in the tragedies. I discovered many points where I could tell that a naked heel had been struck against the earth, and I found others where the tips of toes had left their marks."

"The toe nails?"

"The nails and the tips of the toes as well. They were all small, Chick. They would have made a good average with the impression of the entire foot which I have just described."

"Then it follows that they are all small?"

"Yes; and the idea tallies with the meager descriptions we have from Bliss and Moran."

"Well?"

"They have described their assailants as boys, or small men who had, or seemed to have, very little muscular strength. Now, Morgan said that he thought that his assailants dropped from the trees upon him. Chick, I have found that he was correct in that supposition; or, at least, I have established the fact that some of them were in the trees, and if some of them. why not all of them?"

"That is all right, too."

"Moran mentioned burlap as the substance which was probably thrown over his head; now, I have found three long and narrow strips of burlap in different places in the park, and, without exception, they have borne, here and there, spots of blood on them."

"Indeed!" said Chick.

"And still, all this tells me nothing. That is, they do not take me a step further in the investigation. Now let us go to the tennis court, although I will return to the place in the woods later."

"All right."

"When I examined the ground around the court that night, I found that it required very little to follow the footsteps of Flora Mason and to explain almost exactly what had happened to her. All that kept to myself at the time, and have not told to any body yet, for the reason that it does not take me far enough."

"What did she do, Nick? What happened to her, as you discovered it?"

"When she started back after her racquet, she hurried directly to the spot where she had left it. She picked it up in her hand and started back toward her friends, but she had gone only a few paces when she encountered something which frightened her, and she dropped it again—dropped it, in fact, where it was found later by Agnes Glenn when she returned there with Morgan Bliss."

"How do you know all this?"

"The sun had been down some time. Dew had begun to fall, but it did not begin to fall until about the time when the four young people left the tennis courts together. As proof of this, the place where they all seated themselves on the grass before leaving was plainly marked; and beside that place, also plainly marked, was the figure of the racquet."

"Showing that Flora sat at the end of the group while they were resting."

"Yes; but that is immaterial. What it did show was that she secured her racquet when she came for it, and was in the act of returning to her friends when she was assaulted.

"Now, I traced her footprints on that grass almost as plainly as if they had been in wet sand; and, likewise, I could trace the imprints of bare feet—little feet they were, too, for in one tuft of grass one of them was quite evident.

"I found, as I say, where she started to return with the racquet in her hand, and she had gone only a few paces when she saw something or heard something which so startled her that she dropped the racquet and turned to run away.

"She ran, in fact, several paces, before she was overtaken; but she was overtaken, and from what I have learned since, I think there is no doubt that her assailants leaped upon her back and shoulders as she fled, and bore her to the ground, where they smothered her cries, as they tried to smother the cries of Moran and his companion.

"It is evident from the appearance of the grass at that point that she struggled fiercely for a moment—but only for a moment; and I found that there were many imprints of bare feet around that spot, as if the whole crew were upon and around her at the same time. If I had left that part of the investigation till morning, Chick, I would not have found a thing, for the sun would have dried the dew on the grass, and it would have stretched back into place again, leaving nothing for me to see.

"And now comes a mystery."

"What sort of a mystery?"

"Flora was frightened and turned to run. When she was overtaken, she struggled and was overpowered; yet when that struggle was over, she rose calmly to her feet and permitted herself to be led unresistingly away to the place where her dead body was found three hours later; at least, that is the story which the footprints on the grass had to tell me. If that is not a mystery, what is?"

CHAPTER VI.

ARE THERE HUMAN VAMPIRES?

Chick pondered for a moment over what the detective had just told him.

"I suppose, Nick," he said, presently, "it is a waste of breath to ask you if you are positive regarding that last statement."

"I am certainly positive, else I would not have made it."

"I asked," continued Chick, "because the thought came into my mind that the appearance of such footsteps, or, rather, footprints, might have been the result of a ruse on the part of the murderers."

"Not at all," said Nick, speaking with great emphasis. "In no place under investigation is there an indication that the murderers attempted a ruse of any sort. There is no suggestion that they at any time attempted to cover their tracks. In fact, it is because they did not do so that I am all the more puzzled."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, this: If these crimes had been committed by any person or persons of the kind with which we have had to deal in our careers, effort would have been made to cover up their tracks from the police, while these people, whoever and whatever they are, have relied solely upon their natural cunning and stealth as well as their habits of moving swiftly and silently. In short, Chick, they have acted throughout as if they did not know that such a thing as justice exists, and as if all they have to fear is some sort of personal violence. To put it still more plainly, they have acted as intelligent wild animals might have done, rather than as human beings would do."

"But you do not believe that they are wild animals, do you?"

"Not unless it is possible for humanity to sink so low that it may be classed as wild animal."

"I mean," continued Chick, "that this could not be a sort of repetition of Edgar Poe's story of the murder in the Rue Morgue, could it?"

"No, Chick. There are no apes or monkeys in this affair. The criminals in this are what we call human beings."

"But if they are so small that their feet are no larger than the feet of one of our own American children of ten years of age, what manner of human beings can they be?"

Nick Carter was silent for a moment before he replied, and then, slowly, he said:

"I already have a theory on that point, Chick, but I am not prepared to tell it to you, for I wish you to investigate that very point on your own account and without the aid of any suggestion from me at all."

Chick pondered:

"An idea occurs to me," he said, presently; but Nick held up one hand in warning, and interrupted him hastily:

"Don't express it to me," he said. "I do not want even your ideas at the present time. The only way in which we can hope to work out this case to a successful solution, is on the lines I have stated. I want you to take under consideration each point that I have given you, and to work on it independently of me, so that later we can compare notes. In that way, and in that way alone, can we hope to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion."

"Very good," said Chick.

"And now we will continue," said the detective.

"All right, sir."

"The wounds in the neck are, in each case, the same in character."

"Yes."

"And in each case they are almost precisely in the same spot."

"Yes."

"In the cases of the children who are supposed to have died from the result of accidents the autopsies came too late to determine much, but in each of the other cases, and I have no doubt also in the case described in this paper, we have found every indication save one, that the victim actually bled to death."

"Every indication save one?"

"Yes; and that one is the vital one so far as we are concerned; I refer to the comparative absence of blood."

"I see."

"Take, for instance, the case of Flora Mason."

"Yes."

"The blood had almost disappeared from her body,

It had been drawn out of it. In short, she had lost enough blood so that if it had been spilled around the spot where she was killed or where we discovered her body, the grass and the ground around her as well as her clothing would have been drenched with it. You will admit that this is true."

"Certainly."

"And yet, as a matter of fact, there was not enough of her blood spilled there, or anywhere that we could find, to have filled a gill measure."

"True."

"What became of that blood? What became of the blood that was lost from the veins in the body of Dora Delmar? What became of the blood of all of the victims of these awful tragedies?"

"It can only be accounted for in the way which you suggested at the beginning of this talk," said Chick.

"Well, we haven't got so far as that yet. We must have something more than mere conjecture to go upon. The word vampire is a suggestion so hideous that—from the standpoint of civilization—it is not tenable."

"I agree with you there; and yet——"

Chick paused and Nick waited for him to continue; but when he did not do so, the detective remarked:

"You would say that, from your own past experiences in the case of the woman whom we knew as Dazaar, you are more than half inclined to think that such things as human vampires do exist?"

"Yes; that is what I was about to say; but I paused because I could not truthfully say it. Let us get at it in another way, Nick."

"Well?"

"What is a vampire?"

"Without referring to the dictionary," replied Nick, slowly, "I should reply offhand that a vampire is a sort of huge bat, supposed to inhabit certain, or rather unexplored, unknown countries of the world; that this huge bat is supposed to attack almost any form of animal life, including mankind, and that its method of attack is to bury its fangs in the throat of its victim, and so to suck the blood from the body of the person or animal attacked. In fact, it is known that a sort of beast-bird, or winged beast, does exist which is known by the name of vampire, but I believe it has never been satisfactorily proved that these creatures attack man."

"And," said Chick, "even if they do exist, even if they do attack man, and even if the park where these tragedies have occurred were overflowing with them, they could not have left behind them footprints such as a child might make, nor could they have accomplished what we know they did."

"Right, Chick; now you are getting at it."

"Nick?"

"Well?"

"Can you bring yourself to believe, even for the sake of this investigation, that there is such a horrible thing in existence as a human vampire?"

"Not literally."

"That reply is paradoxical."

"I mean it to be so."

"Then you mean to say that you might be brought to such a belief, figuratively?"

"About that."

"And still I do not understand you."

"Well, if we consider such a thing as a human vampire, we must perforce consider a creature who is human at least in appearance, who drinks the blood of its victims, and who destroys its victims in order that it may drink the blood; in other words, we must consider a human creature who finds its nourishment in the blood of a living being."

"Yes."

"Then I do not believe that such creatures exist."

"If you did believe such a thing, that would be what you would call literal belief?"

"Yes."

"Now what would you describe as figurative belief?"

"Well, Chick, we have both knocked about in the Oriental countries enough to know that there are many strange sects, fetish worships and unspeakable customs in existence there."

"Surely."

"We know, for example, that there is a tribe of natives in the western slope of the Himalaya Mountains which descends into the hot valleys at a certain time in each year for the purpose of capturing venomous serpents and extracting the poison from their fangs; and we know that they have a way of boiling this venom with other substances and then drinking it in order to produce a certain form of intoxication which they worship. We know that there are stranglers in India. We know that there are dervishes in Africa—and we know that there is a vast, untrodden empire in the middle of China where many of the customs are so savage and strange that no white man who has penetrated that section has lived to return and tell us what he saw."

"Very true."

"Then, Chick, figuratively speaking, I do not know that there may not be a class of beings hidden away in some part of the world, who, if they were suddenly transplanted here, might afford us even deeper and greater mysteries to solve than the one which faces us now."

"I see your point, Nick. You are taking the position that you will not say that you do not believe until you know that it is not so."

"Exactly."

"In short, that if there are not people in the world who drink human blood for nourishment, it is possible in your mind that there might be people in the world who would take it in the performance of some religious rite."

"Take it, yes; but I do not go so far as to say, drink it."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DETECTIVES DECIDE ON DESPERATE CHANCES.

"Now, Chick," continued the detective, "we will leave that part of the discussion for the present. I wish to turn to another."

"All right."

"I have shown you the little instrument which young Edward Moran found where it had been half thrust into the neck of the young lady who was with him when they were attacked in the park—have I shown you that instrument for nothing?"

"I don't understand you."

"How did that instrument come to be sticking into that girl's throat?"

"Why, it must have been put there by one of the creatures who attacked them."

"Sure; but why?"

"For the purpose of making the same sort of a wound as those which have been found on the victims of these fiends."

"Exactly. But the point of the question is: Was that instrument used as a murderous weapon?"

"It would seem so at least."

"Well, I don't think so."

"You do not?"

"No."

"What do you think?"

"I think that the death of a victim is the result of what they do, and not the object of their attack. Death is the consequence and not the incentive to the attack."

"You make a distinction with very little difference."

"I don't think so; I think there is a great deal of difference. The incentive for the attack is to procure blood; the fact that the victim dies because of the loss of blood is merely an incident. That instrument is not a murderous weapon."

"It might very well pass for one."

"No, it would not. Let us be literal, not sentimental. It is the last thing on earth which you would select as a weapon if you were going out to kill somebody."

"I grant you that."

"Here it is. Look at it."

"Well?"

"Look at the shape of it. We will begin at the point."

"Well?"

"The point is as sharp as a needle; in fact, it is a needle."

"Yes."

"That needle is hollow—in a word, it is exactly like a hypodermic needle, save for the bulb. Now, we follow up the instrument from the point, and in the distance of half an inch we come to the beginning of the swelling which forms the bulb, which is shaped like an acorn with the point of the acorn toward the point of the needle."

"Well?"

"In other words, when we arrive at the top of the acorn, the shape of the instrument suddenly draws inward again so that we have the effect of a barb without its appearance, and also without its cruel points."

"I see."

"Now, it is plain to me that the bulb was put there for the same reason that a barb is put upon a spear—that is, to prevent it from being dislodged when once it is thrust into the flesh."

"Ah!"

"And it was shaped as it is instead of like a regular barb in order to avoid unnecessary loss of blood."

"A philanthropic motive, surely."

"No, a selfish motive. The loss of blood to the victim was not thought of; but the loss of the use of that blood to the assailant was the father of the idea."

"What a horrible idea, Nick!"

"This instrument was found hanging in the neck of a girl who was attacked by these same people who killed Flora Mason and Dora Delmar. It would not have hung there at all if it had not been for the bulb. Now let us proceed with our examination of the instrument itself. We find that after the shape has passed the acorn bulb, it is smaller for a considerable distance, but that gradually grows larger until it becomes the size of a lead pencil.

"Now, the hole in the needle end of the instrument is no larger than a hair from the head of one of the girls it has killed; but the hole in the upper end of it is an eighth of an inch in diameter.

"Let us suppose that this instrument is jabbed into the throat of a human being so that the needle point pierces a vein, or an artery; what happens if the instrument is left hanging there untouched?"

"Why, the victim would bleed to death."

"Not at all. The victim would not bleed at all."

"Why not, I should like to know?"

"Because the point, and the hole in the point, are so small that the blood in the vein would rush past it without entering it—unless there was some other agency to draw it into the hollow of the instrument."

"Such an agent as suction, for instance?"

"Yes."

"All this still tends toward the theory of vampires."

"Certainly; only figuratively, remember. But my contention proves that death is not the object of attack; it proves that blood—the drawing of blood for some purpose at present unknown to us—is the object of attack, and that death is merely a result of it."

"It is murder just the same."

"Certainly it is murder. Now, the presence of this needle in the neck of the girl who was with Moran, proves another thing—haste."

"Well?"

"Don't you see the point, Chick? This girl was in the wood when she was attacked. Being in the wood and more or less in the dark, those who made the attack were secure from observation, or at least considered that they were, and they lost no time in commencing their operation for the drawing of the blood of their victim. The anæsthetic which they employ—and it is plain that they do employ one which produces a partial insensibility, although not a complete one—was already applied through the thick cloth which has been described as burlap, which was thrown over the head of the victim. Whoever it was who sprang upon her did not care to lose time by waiting, and even before she had fallen to the ground, that instrument was jabbed into place."

"What does all this prove?"

"Wait. In the case of Flora Mason, she was attacked in the open. These creatures doubtless see in the dark

as well as they do in the light, after the manner of owls, or cats, and hence they believed that others could see them as well, although it was at the time almost dark where the attack was made."

"I follow you. Go on."

"Consequently this instrument was not used when she was forced to the ground. They could not, or would not, work at their hellish practices in the open, and the victim in this case had to be dragged to the wood before this instrument, or one like it, was used."

"And therefore only the anæsthetic was employed at first, and as you say, it produces only partial unconsciousness, so she was enabled to walk, with their assistance, to the place of execution."

"Exactly, Chick. Now you have the idea."

"And that, you consider, is the explanation of Flora's footprints wherein she appeared to go to her death willingly?"

"It is."

"Well, Nick, what is the next move?"

"There is only one move which can be made with any hope of bringing us to success," replied the detective.

"And what is that?"

"Somebody must offer himself up as a prospective victim of the vampires, for we can call them by no other name at present."

"You mean that somebody must go to that particular wood in the park and wait there in the night until he is attacked, in the hope of not only fighting off his assailants, but of capturing at least one of them?"

"That is precisely what I mean, Chick."

"I was about to suggest that very plan."

"Were you, indeed? And are you willing to undertake the thing?"

"Willing? I am eager to do it."

"Remember the horror of it, Chick."

"Bah!"

"Very well. Will you go to-night?"

"Yes; to-night."

"And is it your idea to remain in that particular wood where we know that at least two attacks have been made, until you see or hear something, or until daylight comes?"

"Just that."

"Think of the possible consequences, Chick."

"I am not afraid of that. The only thing I fear is that I will not be attacked."

Nick turned to the table with a smile and wrote something on a piece of paper which he folded and handed to his assistant.

"Put that in your pocket," he said, "and do not read it until to-morrow."

"You know something which you have not told me," said Chick.

"No; I only think I know something I have not told you. It is pure guesswork, or I would tell you. And now in regard to your expedition for to-night. I have only one suggestion to make concerning it, which is that you wear a thick leather collar around that part of your neck which the needle is likely to attack."

"All right. I will do that. Now tell me what you are going to do yourself, for I know that you are the last man on earth to send me on such a trip as this one, unless you intend yourself to assume a position of even greater danger. What do you intend to do?"

Nick Carter smiled as he rose from his chair and turned away, but when he reached the door he paused a moment and said:

"When you are in the park, I shall not be far away; only, you must not expect help from me, for I shall be —where I shall be; see?"

CHAPTER VIII.

A TRIBE OF BLOODSUCKERS.

When the detective left the house, an hour after the conversation with Chick, he carried a large leather satchel in his hand, and with this, he proceeded directly to a second-class hotel near the park where the terrible tragedies had taken place.

There he registered under an assumed name—what particular name is not necessary, as it has nothing whatever to do with the incidents of our story—and having accomplished this, he went out again and proceeded at once to the place where he could view the

body of the last reported victim—the one told about in the morning papers.

As in the other cases, the victim was a young woman, but this time not so young as the others.

Every circumstance connected with the discovery of the body and with the appearance of the corpse when found tallied completely with the other crimes. There was not an essential point of difference.

This time the victim belonged to a different walk of life and personally she had not been in any way attractive to the eye save in the respect that she appeared to have been robust and in the full enjoyment of health.

The same awful pallor was upon her skin. The same wound was in her throat. The same stains were down the side of her neck, where the blood had oozed out after the instrument of death had been withdrawn. The same peaceful smile was upon her countenance.

"At least," mused Nick, speaking to himself, and yet uttering the words aloud, "her death must have been painless."

"Do you think so?" asked a voice beside him; and turning, the detective saw before him a man whom he instantly decided was a sailor, for the signs of the sea were stamped upon every article of wearing apparel he had on, and the scent of the salt water seemed to pervade the air about him. His skin was tanned almost to a bronze and his countenance was rendered almost hideous by a myriad of scars.

Nevertheless he had a kindly face, and his eyes sparkled with an intelligent sort of humor which at once attracted the detective.

"You are a stranger here?" he asked, addressing him.

"Ay, ay, sir. Just cast anchor here yesterday. First time I have been back in this port in twenty years," replied the sailor.

"Indeed! And may I ask what brought you over here to view this body?"

"Why, yes. I read about it in the papers this morning, and seein' as how the article referred to other murders of the same kind, I says to myself, says I, maybe, old man, if you go over there and view the wreck—beg pardon, the corpse—maybe you will see something about it that looks natural."

"What do you mean?" asked Nick. "Did you suppose the dead woman might be somebody whom you had once known here? She is scarcely more than twenty years old, and you have been away that long, you say."

"Oh, no! I didn't expect to recognize the corpse, but I thought that maybe I might recognize the handiwork of those who made the corpse."

"I think I will have to ask you to explain that remark," said Nick. "This is not a good place, nor a ripe time for joking."

"Joking? I never was more serious in my life, sir. You see, ten years of the time I have been away from this port was passed as a slave. I was cast away on the coast of China and being captured by a lot of heathen was taken somewhere into the interior. I don't know where it was or how I got there, or for that matter, how I got away, except that I spent months in the mountains and forests after I escaped, before I ever saw the sight of salt water again. But there used to be things like this going on, out there where I was a slave, and when I read that this here business was such a great mystery, I just said to myself that if I could drift out there into their country where they did such things, and if I could live there ten years and then live to return and tell about it, there was no reason why some of them chaps could not drift here, just as I drifted there. That's all."

"Do you mean to tell me that in your experience you have seen people slain in the manner that this woman was killed?" asked Nick.

"Well, I haven't exactly seen anybody killed like that, but I have seen a lot of them after they had been killed."

"Where?" asked Nick.

"In that place I was just telling you about. It used to be a regular thing out there."

"How, a regular thing? I wish you would tell me about it."

"Well, there was a tribe of some sort who used to prey upon the people I was with, and they did it in just that way. It was not an uncommon thing for our people

to find two or three of their women at a time, and every one of them would be fixed out just as this woman is. There would be the same peaceful smile, the same deadly paleness, the same wound in the throat, and—well, it was just the same all around."

"Who were the people who did the killing?"

"That was the strange part of it, mister; we never knew. The people I was with used to call them devils. They had a word to express their meaning which if it could be translated would come pretty near meaning bloodsucker."

"Ah!" said Nick. "Did you ever see any of those bloodsuckers?"

"I never saw one of them in my life, nor for that matter did any of us, but there was a legend in the place which said that somebody had seen some of them at some time or other, and they were described as any other natives of that country would be, except that they had long hair, which they wore twisted into coils at the back of their heads, and I think they were rather smaller than our own people."

"Did your people, as you call them, never try to capture these others who murdered their women?"

"Try to capture them? Bless you, no! They were that afraid of them that if it was supposed that one of them was anywheres near, the whole tribe would fly to their dugouts and hide. If one of the bloodsuckers had promised them that he would walk past in broad daylight so they could see him, the whole caboodle of them would have fallen on their faces and refused to look."

"They were superstitious about them, eh?"

"Superstitious? Well, I could never get them to talk about the bloodsuckers to me. I was there ten years and all I learned about them was what I had a chance to see and observe; and I have told you all I found out in that way. I thought maybe it would interest you to know that there is a people in the world, somewhere in China, who are called bloodsuckers, and who kill other people in about that way."

"It does interest me very much, indeed. Are you quite sure that you have told me all you know about it?"

"Why, yes. The only points worth knowing, to my mind, is that the bloodsuckers never killed men; they always killed women; and I notice by this paper that all of these murders have been women."

"That is true."

"Well, sir, that's the size of it. I wish I could tell you more, but I cannot."

"Wait," said Nick. "Let me ask you a few questions. Maybe you can tell me something."

"All right. Go ahead."

"You say that the people who were killed over there, were killed in the same manner, and that they looked the same after death?"

"Just the same."

"Now, can you tell me how they were killed? I mean what sort of a weapon was used?"

"Sure; now that I think of it; but you wouldn't know if I should tell you. I never saw anything like it in any other place."

"Describe it," said Nick.

"Well, it was about that long;" and he made a sign with his fingers which indicated about the length of the instrument which Nick had in his pocket. "It was about as big around as a lead pencil, and it tapered to a point; only there was a bulb just before you got to the point. That was there to keep the thing from falling out after it had been stuck in a victim's throat."

"What was the material of which it was made?" asked Nick.

"Blessed if I know. We used to find one every once in a while, and it always puzzled me to know how people who were savages could make such instruments as they were, until one day I discovered the old chief making a knife in the same manner; then I knew."

"How was it?" asked Nick.

"Simple enough. They had a sort of clay out there. Very fine, it was, when dry; almost like flour, so soft; and they used to boil that clay and strain off the scum on the top. Well, sir, that scum was some sort of metal which they could mold into any shape they pleased, and then afterward they would bake it in hot earth until it was as hard as steel, only it looks like what you call aluminum, I have since found out."

Nick took the instrument from his pocket and passed it to the sailor.

"Is that the same?" he asked; and the sailor started with surprise.

"Bless me!" he cried. "If you ain't got a yek-yak! That is what they called 'em—yek-yaks. I'd hate to feel the point of one of them in my throat."

"But," continued Nick, "was that instrument the only thing they used to kill their victims?"

"I don't know. Some said that they dosed their victims with some kind of poison before they stuck the yek-yak into them; but I don't know."

"This instrument is the same as those which you saw in that country, is it?"

"Yes, sir; just the same."

"Now, if you will tell me your name and where I can find you again, I have no doubt that I shall have need of you," said Nick.

"All right, sir. I'm just plain Bill Jones, and I'm boatswain aboard the *Cameron Pride*, now down at Martin's Stores in Brooklyn. We shall be there a matter of two weeks, and then we sail for Cape Town; but anything that I can do for you, you can count on me sure."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Jones."

"Do you mind telling me who you are, sir?"

"Not at all. I am Nick Carter, a detective."

"Nick Carter? Is that so? Shake! I've heard about you and I'm proud to make your acquaintance, sir; that I am. If Bill Jones can do anything for you, send a gig for me and I'll come; and if you should happen to run afoul of one of them bloodsuckers, I hope you'll let me see him."

CHAPTER IX.

SETTING TRAPS TO CATCH DEMONS.

The reader will remember that both Nick Carter and his assistant, Chick, were to spend the night in the park, as the hope that one or both of them might be attacked by the fiends who slew the girls, and that in that attack, one or both of them might be able to capture one or more of the persons who were concerned in these tragedies.

It will also be recalled that according to the directions given by the detective, the two were not to be together; that Chick was to take his place in the wood where Morgan Bliss and Agnes Glenn had so nearly suffered at their hands, and where Edward Moran and the young lady who accompanied him had so narrowly escaped becoming victims of another tragedy, and that Nick had not designated what he intended to do, but had given the impression that the tennis courts, where Flora Mason was slain, was to be his fighting ground.

It will be necessary, therefore, for the purposes of this tale, to follow the experiences of both detectives.

Nick we have already seen go to a hotel near the park and leave his handbag there, preparatory to costuming himself for his night adventure; therefore we will return for a time to Chick, who performed quite a necessary part in the events of that night.

Chick adopted no disguise whatever, but like his chief he also carried a bag.

He did not, however, deem it necessary for his purposes to go to a hotel, but he managed so that he arrived at the park entrance and entered it about half an hour before sundown.

Having entered the park he made his way directly to the little wood between the paths, where he intended to camp for the night.

He had not a great amount of time in which to accomplish all he wished to do, and he accordingly set to work at once.

From the bag he took a bundle of sticks or handles, which were made like the joints of a fishing rod, and these he fastened together, thus manufacturing a pole which was something more than ten feet in length. To the end of this he adjusted a new paint brush which was four inches in width.

Next he unscrewed the top from a pot which contained a pasty-looking substance, and having dipped the brush into this, he proceeded to "paint" with it every limb of a tree that was within his reach.

He worked rapidly and thoroughly, so that in a surprisingly short time every twig on which an object could be hung, had been coated with the pasty, lime-like substance.

That accomplished, he disjointed his pole and replaced it and the paste in the satchel, from which he took a second package; and this contained nothing more nor less than common white Indian meal.

With this he began at the far end of the space he wished to cover, and walking backward from there, he sprinkled the ground so thoroughly with it that at the end of a few moments there was not a space upon which a dog might have trodden without leaving the imprint of its foot.

Next he took from the satchel a number of long, slender, pliable ropes, each having a noose at the end; and these he arranged on the ground in such a manner that there was not a space which one of the loops—and there were nine of them in all—did not surround, while the ropes leading from each of the loops were all focused to the center of the entire space.

Now he covered the ground with a second coating of the Indian meal, and in doing so covered the ropes and his own tracks as well, although he cared nothing about the latter. The first coat had been used merely to absorb the dampness so that the second coat would take a better and a more lasting impression.

In the center of the place he arranged a folding camp-chair. Then he tied the ends of the nine ropes into one knot, so that by jerking upon one he jerked upon all of them, and then he nodded his head in satisfaction, for he considered the work well done, and he felt certain that no live thing could approach the spot where that camp-chair was located, without leaving traces of its presence, and without making it possible to follow those traces for a considerable distance as well.

It was nearly dark when these preparations were completed, and his next move was to prepare himself for the night.

He had taken Nick's advice in regard to the leather collar, but he had improved upon it, for it was very wide and came down so that it almost covered his chest and a part of his back; he had also provided himself with a leather cap which was thick and solid.

Having adjusted these, he took his seat on the chair, for it was now quite dark among the trees.

"If it is true that those little murderers start abroad as soon as it is dark, or a little before that time, I will not have long to wait," he murmured to himself; but all the same he composed himself with sufficient patience to remain on that spot and in that attitude throughout the night, if necessary.

An hour passed, and although he listened intently he heard not a sound save the expected noises of the night.

Soon after that he thought he detected the snapping of a twig over his head, and he was instantly alert; but as no other sound like it occurred, he presently resumed his former attitude of waiting.

Thus another hour passed, and he was beginning to think that he was not to be disturbed, when he was so startled that he leaped to his feet as if a pin had been thrust into his anatomy.

A series of piercing shrieks—not screams, but shrieks—so wild and strange and so unexpected and unknown in their cadence that they seemed weird and unreal, came to him from a seemingly distant part of the park, and he leaped to his feet, his first thought being that the little men of the night had indeed attacked somebody and that another horrible murder was being committed.

It seemed then as if the motion he made was the signal for an attack upon himself, for he felt on the instant as if he were surrounded by unknown beings, and in a second he seemed to be covered by them.

They dropped upon him from the trees. They leaped upon him apparently from all sides at once. They seemed almost to rise from the ground.

He struck out with both hands. He tried to seize upon the strange creatures, and at the same instant he felt a sharp blow against the side of his neck, against the leather collar.

Although Chick had been awaiting that attack, it nevertheless came as a surprise, and a full second of time must have elapsed before he remembered the knotted ends of the ropes.

He tried to reach for the creature on his back with one hand while he grasped at the ropes with the other; but he missed the creature, although he did succeed in seizing the rope—and at the same instant that he did so the creature on his back seemed to leap off again.

But he had the rope in his hand, and he jerked upon it with all his strength, and——

He uttered an exclamation of joy, for he felt that at least one of the loops had caught something.

It caught fast to something and held it, and then, seemingly from every quarter around him arose a series of those piercing shrieks, the same as those he had heard only a moment before from a distant part of the park.

Holding fast to the rope with one hand he pulled his electric lantern from his pocket with the other, and just as he raised it and pressed the button—just as the light flashed out for one brief interval of time, and he saw in that fleeting instant that two of the loops had captured prisoners and that he was drawing a pair of strange little figures toward him, something again lighted upon his back.

As he dropped the lantern to the ground and put up his hand to seize the creature who was on his back, he felt a sharp blow on his head, the touch of a rough substance against his face, and smelled an unknown and strangely pungent odor in his nostrils.

And in that instant his senses reeled. A million lights danced in front of his eyes, and then—he reeled and fell headlong to the ground, senseless.

* * * * * * *

And now, for a time, let us return to Nick Carter.

When he left the sailor he returned to the hotel where he succeeded in killing time until the moment came for his departure for the scene of his vigil.

Nick had selected the tennis courts for his adventures rather than the wood, for the reason that it best fitted in with his plans, as we will presently discover.

Before he left the hotel he called the proprietor to his room and told him who he was and why he was there.

"I shall require a little help in my preparations," he said; and then he proceeded to dress himself in the costume he had chosen for the night.

In a word it was the costume of a woman.

In the arrangement of it, so that he might appear exactly like a woman, he had forgotten nothing, and when at last he was prepared to go out, the proprietor clapped his hands in admiration.

"You'll do," he said. "I would take my hat off to you anywhere, just as you stand."

When, a little later, Nick Carter entered the park and took his way toward the tennis courts, any person meeting him would not have doubted for an instant that he was not what he appeared to be.

He also carried a bundle under his arms, and it appeared to be very heavy, even for a man as powerful and strong as we know Nick Carter to be.

The sun was just sinking when he reached the tennis grounds, and he at once undid the huge bundle and emptied the contents on the ground.

One glance would have told any boy who is fond of sport what they were; two dozen of the finest and strongest steel traps—of the size that is known as fox traps—that he could procure—and to each of the traps was attached a coil of pliable, woven wire.

He selected a spot on the tennis ground not far from where Flora Mason had been attacked and there he opened the traps and set them, after which he arranged them at random around a certain space in the grounds which he had reason to think the most available.

Next he drove a long iron stake deeply into the soft earth, and to this he fastened an end of each of the woven-wire cords, so that, in fact, each trap was really fast to that stake.

Then, with a glance at the gathering darkness, he began to pace slowly up and down among the traps. His chin was bowed against his breast, and he seemed to be lost in meditation.

He was, in fact, waiting for the coming of the little demons of the night.

CHAPTER X.

THE LITTLE YAKS, OF THIBET.

If you had passed by that spot and had looked out upon that open glade, you would have believed that it was a woman who was pacing up and down in the starlight.

No doubt the little eyes which looked out from

among the bushes upon the scene thought so too, for they darted hither and thither, a full half dozen of them. Now they seemed to pause and whisper together, and again they held apart from each other, while their small bodies seemed to quiver with excitement.

After a while, when the night grew darker, they became bolder.

Now and then one of them would dart out from the cover of the bushes toward the detective, but a warning hiss, only just loud enough to reach the ears of the little creature, seemed in each case to convey an order, for the thing would hesitate and then fall back again among the shadows of the bushes.

Thus an hour passed.

And thus a second hour seemed almost to have gone by, when, as if by unanimous assent, they all slided forward together toward the spot where the pseudo woman was pacing up and down.

Their little bare feet made no noise on the grass.

Not one of the small beings uttered a sound.

The strange, silklike texture of their clothing was so soft that it gave forth no warning of their approach.

And still they glided onward, while still the detective paced up and down, with his head bent forward, seeing nothing and evidently making no effort to see anything.

Nearer and nearer they came to him, and then, like sprites in fairy tales, they leaped forward as if with one impulse.

They were not ten feet from the detective when they began that rush, and they had not made a sound which would have attracted the attention of a cat, and yet, as they sprang toward Nick Carter, he turned so that he faced them—turned and opened his arms wide, so that the foremost of the assailants leaped directly into his embrace, and the second one of the attack followed.

The muscular arms of the detective closed like a vise around these two forms, and then, while one arm held them where they were, struggling and kicking, and emitting those piercing shrieks which Chick could hear from his place in the woods, the detective's other arm shot forward, and there was a revolver in the grasp of that hand.

But quick as Nick was, ere the revolver could be discharged he felt a sting in the back of that hand which seemed to paralyze it.

The revolver dropped to the ground, useless, and the hand dropped to his side, also useless for the moment; and in the meantime, from around him he heard other shrieks which continued, one after another in the most weird, piercing and heartrending manner.

But his hand was paralyzed only for a moment.

The sting he had received in it had impaired its usefulness only for that one brief instant when the revolver fell to the ground.

Still holding the two beings so tightly against him that they were utterly helpless and indeed, as he presently discovered, were unconscious, he stooped and seized again the weapon at his feet.

But there was nothing at which to fire.

Save for the shrieks, which had now degenerated to moans, which were close beside him, and which he knew came from one or more of the traps, there was not a thing in sight except the one dark figure in one of the traps, and the two he held in his arms.

He dropped the revolver again then, for he saw that he would not need it, and then a glance at the creatures in his arms told him that they were senseless—that he had crushed the breath, if not the life, out of them.

Instantly he laid them on the ground.

Then, with cord which he had brought with him and which he had fastened around his waist—for it must not be forgotten that he was dressed like a woman and had no pockets—he bound the ankles and the wrists of his captives so securely that there was no danger that they would escape.

That accomplished, he visited his traps, only one of which had proved of value.

But one of them had made a capture, and in a moment he had the squealing and moaning figure in his grasp, had released it from the trap and had bound it in the same manner as the others.

This last one tried to talk to him. It uttered words in a strange and outlandish tongue which he had never

heard before, and he knew almost all the languages of the earth.

But it made no attempt at resistance. It made no effort to fight him. It did not even try to escape, but gave itself up passively to the process of being bound with the cords.

"What queer little imps of Satan they are!" exclaimed the detective, as he drew back and surveyed his work. "The little Yaks, of lower Thibet, as I suspected."

He found his lantern then, and pressed the button, throwing the sharp light it gave upon the creature with the wounded foot, who was the only one of the three captives who was conscious.

And the light seemed to give the creature more pain than the bruise made by the trap.

It uttered a cry of anguish, more piercing than the shrieks which had rended the air a moment since, and sought to hide its head from the terrible rays.

"Creatures of darkness," muttered Nick; and then he added, suddenly: "By Jove! I wonder if by any chance Bill Jones, of the *Cameron Pride*, can understand their lingo?"

He noticed then that the other two of his captives were reviving, and with the thought that it would be awkward to attempt to carry all three of his prisoners in his arms, he tied them securely together, and then cut the thongs which bound their feet.

He made them understand presently that they must walk in front of him, and he wondered at their docility when they hastened to obey him as soon as he had made them know what he desired.

Then, having sprung the traps so that no unsuspecting person would walk into them, and with a revolver in his right hand and the cord which held his captives in his left, he led them away as one might have led so many dogs, toward the grove where Chick was stationed.

As he neared the grove he shouted out:

"Hello, Chick!"

But there was no answer and he hastened forward, throwing the light from his lantern ahead of him.

Then, as he left the pathway and threw the light upon the ground, he stopped, for he could see that Chick was lying stretched upon the ground as if he were dead.

For just one fraction of an instant, Nick Carter was terrified at the thought that his best friend had been killed by the Yaks; but even as the thought shot through him, Chick moved and then sat up, blinking at the light, for he was facing it and looking straight into it.

"Chick," said Nick again.

"Hello, Nick! That you? By thunder! Look there!"

Nick turned the light in the direction where Chick pointed, and there, seated upon the ground, with eyes wide open, but with one of Chick's loops drawn taut around its waist, was another of the creatures of the night.

"Have I got 'em, Nick?" asked Chick, "or is there really something there?"

"There is something there all right. What knocked you out, old chap?"

"Something which the little devils thrust under my nose. I thought it was a blow on my head, but it was the odor of the stuff I felt. Like ammonia, only worse. Hello! you've got three of them, have you?"

"Yes; but there are others at liberty. What have you got on the ground here?"

"Cornmeal. We'll come back and study it later on."

"No need," said the detective. "I know a lot about the devils, and what I don't know, Bill Jones, of the *Cameron Pride*, can tell me."

* * * * * * *

Boatswain Bill Jones was called out of his bunk that night and bidden to police headquarters, and there, in the presence of the inspector, Nick Carter, Chick and a few interested policemen, he was confronted with Nick Carter's captives.

"Did I ever see creatures like them before?" repeated Bill, after a question from the detective. "Of course I have; but I never supposed that them little Yaks were the bloodsuckers we so much feared off there in China where I was a slave. Them ain't men, Mr. Carter; them's women."

"Women?" exclaimed all those present, at once.

"Sure! Women. Little Yak women. Widders, in fact."

"Widows?"

"That's what I said. Say, I know all about that blood-sucking business now. It's as plain as the nose on my face, and that ain't out of sight, by any means."

"Explain what you mean, then."

"Well, it's this way. When a Yak dies, if he's married, his widder is banished to the forest, where she must remain for ten years unless she can redeem herself by giving her dead husband another mate in the happy hunting ground, or whatever they call it. Say, that is not a pleasant story to tell, but it is the truth. Shall I tell it just as it is?"

"That is what we are here to know."

"Well, in order to return to civilization, or their excuse for civilization, she has got to furnish her dead husband with another wife on the other side of Jordan—their Jordan, of course."

"Get on with the story, Bill," said Nick.

"It's this way. The only way she can do that, according to their belief, is to slay a female animal of some kind—it don't much matter what kind—and draw the blood from it before it dies. They catch that blood in a sort of bag which is made of the same kind of silk their clothes are, and which will hold water; then they take the blood to a place in the woods where there is a hollow tree and there they bury it."

"Go on."

"After it has been buried a certain length of time, I don't know how long, only that it is several days, they build a fire over the spot where the blood is buried, and then they say what you call incantations over it.

"Now, that blood being female blood is supposed to go to heaven in the form of a woman, and as it's being sent there by the widder of somebody who is already there, he is supposed to be called on to accept that creature for his mate up there—or down there—I reckon it is down, don't you?"

"More than likely."

"Well, that is the whole story, except that two or three times women widders have been burned at the stake over there for killing women when they weren't smart enough to catch a doe or a she bear; and there are so many Yak widders, owing to the wars and the fights and all that, that they have formed settlements all around the country.

"These here Yaks have killed them girls in the park for just that purpose alone. There ain't no two ways about that."

"Can you talk their language?"

"Bet your life I can."

"Well, talk to them. Let us hear what they have to say about it."

Bill Jones turned to the Yaks and talked rapidly to them.

At first they seemed greatly astounded to hear their own language spoken, but presently they all began at once what appeared to be an explanation to him; and after half an hour of this byplay, Bill turned again to the detective.

"They say that about fifty of them, as near as I can make out, were brought over here to this country by a Lama, whom they call Dazaar, about six months ago, and that Dazaar taught them that they would go to glory without any trouble if only they would kill white girls and drink their blood."

The listeners shuddered.

"But," continued Bill, "they assert that they never could learn to do that, and although for the want of being able to find animals to kill and so get female blood to bury and roast, they had had to resort to killing women and girls in order to be freed from their curse, they have not meant to do any harm."

"Good Heaven! Can such creatures exist? Where are the remainder of the fifty?"

"They have all got away and gone back, or are dead, except the few who were in the park."

"And how many were there there?"

"About a dozen, as near as I can make out. These say that they will go out there with me to-morrow and bring all the others in, and I guess that is about the best that can be done with them. I suppose prison for life is about the best that can happen to them anyhow."

* * * * * * *

"Nick," said Chick, the next morning, "I have just remembered to read that scrap of paper you gave me before we went into the park. It says: 'You will not be attacked.' Now, why did you think that?"

"Because I had already made up my mind that they would only attack a woman. It seems that I was mistaken, however."

"No, you were right. They attacked me, to be sure, but as soon as they discovered that I was not a woman they left me uninjured, although I was insensible and at their mercy."

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 405, will contain "The Demons of the Night; or, The Terrors of the Ice Cavern." Look out for a rattling story.

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